

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman (R-Colorado) today sent a letter, along with 19 other Members of Congress, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asking her to withhold the \$300 million in aid pledged to the Gaza Strip at Monday's Gaza Reconstruction Conference in Egypt. The conference was held in response to recent fighting between Hamas and Israel that left Gaza in ruins. Gaza is reported to have suffered \$2 billion in damages in recent fighting.

"Giving the money to the Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip is no different than giving the money directly to Hamas," Coffman said. "Hamas needs to understand that they will not benefit from continually firing rockets into Israel."

The Gaza Strip was bombarded by the Israeli military after Hamas launched rockets into southern Israel. Hamas, the ruling political party in the Gaza Strip, is currently on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations. Hamas denies Israel's right to exist and condones violence against Israelis and Jews.

Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad is requesting \$2.8 billion in foreign aid for rebuilding Gaza. Secretary of State Clinton has pledged that the United States will commit \$300 million in reconstruction aid for Gaza.

In the letter to Secretary Clinton, Coffman and his co-signers said, "We believe that should the U.S. spend \$300 million in Gaza, no matter how well intentioned, it will only contribute to the problem, not move us toward a solution. Hamas is not a reasonable, good faith actor in Gaza. They exploit international aid, not only physically, but politically as well, using it to leverage control of their citizens and attack other Palestinian factions. Even well spent aid is ultimately under threat of being wasted due to further warfare, because of Hamas's unending incitation of violence."

Coffman concluded, "This administration should not send U.S. taxpayer dollars to an organization that continues to incite violence and be rewarded with international aid."

Members of Congress that have signed onto the letter include: Mary Fallin (OK-05), Donald Manzullo (IL-16), Michele Backmann (MN-06), Duncan Hunter (CA-52), Bill Posey (FL-15) K. Michael Conaway (TX-11), Louie Gohmert (TX-01), Trent Franks (AZ-02), Eric Cantor (VA-07), Daniel Lungren (CA-03), Jeb Hensarling (TX-05), Cynthia Lummis (WY-At Large), Randy Neugebauer (TX-19), Mike Pence (IN-06), Doug Lamborn (CO-05), Rob Bishop (UT-01), Henry Brown (SC-01), Dan Burton (IN-05) and Mike Rogers (AL-03).

A copy of the letter is below:

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The Honorable Hillary Clinton

Secretary Of State

Dear Secretary Clinton:

It would be our absolutely last goal to hinder your efforts in finding a path through the morass in the Middle East that might eventually lead to a lasting and significant peace, but recent media reports relating to your efforts at the Gaza Reconstruction Conference at Sharm el-Sheikh demand we notify you of our intentions regarding aid to Gaza.

Since the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993 and the establishment of limited Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1994, the U.S. government has committed more than \$2 billion in bilateral economic assistance to the Palestinians. The situation in Gaza has not improved. Millions more, especially at such a turbulent time, will not help. When the appropriate time comes to spend U.S. taxpayer dollars in Gaza, there needs to be a better method of delivering aid directly to the people of Gaza, and better accounting for it.

We believe that should the U.S. spend \$300 million in Gaza, no matter how well intentioned, it will only contribute to the problem, not move us toward a solution. Hamas is not a reasonable, good faith actor in Gaza. They exploit international aid, not only physically, but politically as well, using it to leverage control of their citizens and attack other Palestinian factions. Even well spent aid is ultimately under threat of being wasted due to further warfare, because of Hamas' unending incitation of violence.

We urge you to ensure that any money given to Gaza is withheld until such a time that you can guarantee it will not reflect positively on Hamas or contribute in any way to their benefit.

We welcome any opportunity to discuss this matter further with you. It should be possible, although that has not yet been proved, to spend taxpayer funds in Gaza without contributing to the violence, chaos, and suffering in that land.